

Discussion Guide for Simon Sinek Video

“Inspiring Leadership, Change & Innovation”

By: Simon Sinek

Video length: 29 minutes

Background: On 20 June 2016, Simon Sinek addressed via Skype the students of the 27th Legal Administrators Course in Charlottesville. In this video, Mr. Sinek speaks for approximately fourteen (14) minutes and then answers questions from the audience.

Mr. Sinek is a British/American author of four books, including the 2009 best seller “Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action.” He is also a highly distinguished motivational speaker and marketing consultant who is world renowned for his creative and inspirational views of leadership and organizations.

Content of Lecture:

- Defining a leader
 - Anthropological definition - who is the “alpha” of the group?
 - There are benefits of being a leader or senior, but there is a social contract between the leader and the junior members of the group. In return for receiving the benefits of leadership, the leader protects the group when it is threatened.
 - If a leader violates the social contract, the system of trust between leader and led collapses
 - Moral discomfort results when members of the group sense that their leaders sacrifice the members of the group in order to benefit themselves
 - “Leadership is not about being in charge, it’s about taking care of those in your charge.”
- Behaviors indicating poorly led organizations (protecting oneself)
 - Group members send CYA emails
 - Group members keep folder of all the good things they’ve done to show leader
 - Illegal and/or immoral behavior of group because of poor leadership
- Leaders should strive to create an environment where members feel safe to take risks and make mistakes (leaders should assume risks)

Questions from Audience:

(Mr. Sinek entertains approximately 15 minutes of questions from audience)

- Leaders love their charges before their charges love them.
- How should we address toxic leadership?
- Trust vs. Performance
 - Mr. Sinek uses an example of how the Navy Seals attempt to assess candidates for Seal Team 6 by using a trust versus performance model
- Top down metrics for assessing performance is important. But how should we assess whether a person has the trust of their peers? Which is more important?
- Peer reviews? Mr. Sinek thinks peer reviews aid in identifying toxicity.

Discussion Questions:

- Mr. Sinek provides a modern example of when a leader breaches the social contract. What other examples can you provide?
- Review ADRP 6-22 (Army Leadership), para. 1-1. Discuss Mr. Sinek's anthropological definition of leadership and compare it to how the Army doctrinally defines leadership. How do Army leaders take care of those in their charge if it means sending them into a dangerous situation?
- What are other indicators of poorly led organizations?
- Mr. Sinek states that "everyone had the capacity for leadership, but that doesn't mean everyone should be a leader or wants to be a leader." Do you agree or disagree with this assessment? Does the Army's leadership development model ensure the right persons are becoming leaders? In what ways would you change our current model, if at all?
- Mr. Sinek places great emphasis on how a subordinate "feels" when assessing the optimal environment for a well led organization. Does the Army leadership model and promotion system account for the feelings subordinates have toward their leaders?